

Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research

**Trieste
December 16, 2004**

Plenary Meeting Report

DELEGATIONS PRESENT

Member countries: Argentina, Austria, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States

Liaison countries: Croatia, Romania, and Slovakia

Observers: Estonia, Greece, Switzerland, the Conference on Jewish Material Claims against Germany, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

The meeting was introduced by H.E. Goffredo Sottile, Prefect of Trieste; Dr. Roberto Antonaz, Representative of the Regione Friuli-Venezia Giulia; Prof. Amos Luzzato, President of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities; and Rav. Umberto Piperno, Chief Rabbi of Trieste.

Messages from H.E. Gianfranco Fini, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and H.E. Valentina Aprea, Secretary of State of the Ministry of Education, were conveyed to the participants.

1. Follow-up on Denmark's and Latvia's Memberships

- In response to the ITF Chair's questions regarding the perception of Holocaust education and remembrance in Denmark, addressed to the Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs in July 2004, Ambassador Tyge Lehmann, Danish Representative to the ITF, stated that:

Denmark bases its understanding of the Holocaust on the content of the Stockholm Declaration of January 2000, wherein the term *Shoah* refers to the genocide of the Jews during World War II.

It is clear that the issue of addressing the Holocaust must not be mixed up with messages addressing other crimes against humanity.

- The German delegation, however, expressed concern regarding a declaration that the Prime Minister of Denmark made on the occasion of the Danish Holocaust Remembrance Day, in which he established an equivalence between the crimes of the Soviet regime and the Holocaust.

Following communication with the ITF Chair regarding Holocaust education, remembrance, and research in Latvia, Ambassador Andris Teikmanis explained that although the Latvian Historical Commission works on both Nazi and Soviet totalitarian regimes that ruled Latvia, no equivalence is implied between the genocide of the Jews perpetrated by the Nazis and their collaborators and the crimes of the Soviet regime.

Moreover, ITF national delegations were updated about the efforts of the Latvian government to investigate and bring to trial persons suspected of assisting in the mass killings of Jews in Nazi-occupied Latvia.

2. International Tracing Service (ITS): A Report on the Current Situation

- Mr. Charles Biedermann, Director of the ITS, and Mr. Jean-David Chappuis, Deputy Director of the Red Cross, explained in detail the mechanisms of the ITS of Bad-Arolsen. Mr. Chappuis emphasized that any change in the functioning of the ITS must be decided by consensus of the countries represented in the ITS International Commission. The Red Cross is therefore bound by the Bonn Agreements of 1955 and cannot act on its own initiative.
- The ITF Chair also reported on the visit of ITF delegates to Bad-Arolsen on October 10, 2004, which yielded no concrete results and did not meet the delegates' expectations in obtaining more detailed information about ITS holdings.
- Following these explanations, and reaffirming that the mission of the ITF is to urge the opening of Bad-Arolsen archives to scholars and researchers, the ITF decided:

To deliver a press release calling on the ITS and the International Committee of the Red Cross to release immediately any information regarding the content of ITS archives and to allow immediate research access to the holdings via the deposit of digitized or microform copies at major international centers of Holocaust research. The ITF also calls on member countries of the ITS International Commission to support and facilitate the achievement of these goals.

To create a subcommittee in charge of reviewing the 1955 Bonn Agreements that govern the functioning of the ITS. The committee will comprise representatives from Austria, France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, and the United States. It will be presided over by the Netherlands. A meeting will take place in January 2005 in the Hague. Conclusions of the subcommittee shall be presented to the ITF national delegations at the next plenary meeting in Poland.

3. Candidacies for Membership

- **Greece** was accepted as an ITF Liaison Country, in partnership with France.
- **Romania** was accepted as an ITF Member. The Romania Working Group led by France and Israel therefore concludes its activities. Participating in the Romanian delegation are representatives of the Ministry of Defense, Foreign Affairs, and Education, and the University of Bucharest.
- **Switzerland** was accepted as an ITF Member. Participating in the Swiss delegation are representatives of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education, and several non-governmental organizations.

The Swiss delegates were asked to further clarify the state of Holocaust education in Switzerland, particularly with regard to the cantonal system of education, and to provide

information about teacher training in Switzerland. The remarks of the Swiss delegates must be distributed to the ITF national delegations over the general listserv.

- **Slovakia**, currently in a liaison project with Germany, has announced its intention to become a candidate for ITF membership in 2005 under the ITF Chairmanship of Poland. The German delegation expressed its support for their candidacy.

4 Liaison countries

- The relationship that started in 2003 between Estonia and Sweden is now formalized in an Estonia Liaison Working Group. Thus far, one project, a teacher-training seminar, has been realized in cooperation with the Jan Tonnisson Institute of Tallinn.

5 Working Groups

5.1 Academic Working Group (Cf. detailed report of the AWG on the listserv)

- The AWG Chair, Dr. Juliane Wetzel (Germany), expressed the group's full support of all ITF initiatives to open fully the ITS archives in Bad Arolsen. AWG Members are represented in the subcommittee created for that purpose.
- In reference to the ITF communication policy, the AWG will suggest to the national delegations ways to intervene as a body in ongoing political issues in both member and non-member countries.
- The following proposals will be presented at the next meeting of the Strategic and Implementation Working Group in Poland:

The ITF could deliver recommendations and make declarations about internal national issues related to Holocaust remembrance.

The ITF could make public declarations regarding ongoing genocide cases.

ITF working groups could be allowed to deliver press releases and/or other sorts of public declarations on their own behalf.

- The ITF and AWG Chairs thanked the national delegations for having appointed delegates to the group in 2004. Only the delegation of Israel has no representative in the AWG.
- In the meantime, the AWG Chair reiterated the importance of AWG members taking part in the review of project proposal applications when they are asked to, so as not to cause unnecessary delay to applicants. To reinforce this, a welcome letter explaining in detail AWG procedures be drafted and distributed to new members.

5.2 Education Working Group (Cf. detailed report of the EWG on the listserv)

- The EWG meeting dealt first with the review of the reports on Holocaust education presented by ITF member countries. To date, only the reports of Argentina and Hungary have not been received. The following items were presented to the national delegations:

EWG delegates have formed six subcommittees that will each review three or four country reports. The subcommittees will be in touch directly with the national delegations regarding possible improvements to the reports.

The EWG insisted on the importance in answering sincerely the questionnaire, as it is used as a framework for the reports—particularly with regard to obstacles to teaching the Holocaust.

The EWG will present conclusions and recommendations regarding Holocaust education in ITF member countries at the next plenary meeting under Polish Chairmanship.

The reports' basic questionnaire will be included in the Baseline Studies for Liaison and Membership Candidacies. The new Baseline Studies will be circulated over the general listserv once the national delegations have approved it.

- EWG Chair Paul Salmons (United Kingdom) presented these additional issues to the national delegations:

The EWG guidelines for teaching the Holocaust (What to Teach on the Holocaust, Why to Teach the Holocaust, How to Teach the Holocaust, and Guidelines for Study Trips) are available on the ITF Web site. The delegations that have not translated these guidelines to their national languages are encouraged to do so as soon as possible.

The EWG guidelines should have a more prominent position on the Web site. Currently they are not easily accessible to visitors. The Information Working Group and the USHMM will suggest a new Web site design to remedy this problem.

The EWG will draft a new Project Proposal Application (PPA). They will also compile an annex to be circulated exclusively for educational projects. The draft PPA will be presented to the Fund Working Group and the national delegations over the listserv.

A welcome letter explaining in detail the internal procedures of the EWG will be circulated to new members.

A new EWG subcommittee has been created in order to establish criteria for the evaluation of teacher-training seminars and curricula on the Holocaust.

Countries that have not appointed two representatives to the EWG are requested to do so in order to improve the efficiency of the group, particularly with regard to project review. These countries include Argentina, Austria, Hungary, Luxembourg, and Poland.

The EWG Chair insisted that the delegates appointed by each country be specialists in Holocaust education and available to participate in the group's various activities.

The Chair of the EWG insisted on the necessity of the group meeting at least three days during the ITF plenary sessions.

The EWG has unanimously appointed Karen Polak (Anne Frank House, the Netherlands) Chair. Her mandate will begin with the Polish Chairmanship.

5.3 ITF Fund Working Group

- Dr. Jan Alhberg (Sweden), Chair of the Fund Working Group, reported on the healthy state of the ITF Fund. As of December 31, 2004, the fund's capital was USD 290,000. Since its inception, the ITF has funded 60 projects, with 22 of those in 2004—approximately the same amount as in 2003 (21 projects) and slightly more than in 2002 (15 projects). (See annex 1.) The average amount of monies requested for each project is increasing, from USD 16,500 in 2003 to USD 19,000 in 2004. However, there is still a balance between the ITF's income and its expenses.
- The Argentinean delegation, facing delays in fulfilling its annual contributions to the ITF, declared its intention to pay for the year 2005.
- The Swedish delegation, in charge of managing the Fund, informed the plenary that two or three random audits of projects supported by the ITF will take place in 2005. The audit costs will be deducted from the ITF Fund.

5.4 Information Working Group (Cf. detailed IWG report on the listserv)

Two main issues were presented by IWG Chair Michelle Gross (United States):

- The IWG will propose to the national delegations a new design for the Web site, particularly to address the demands of the EWG. The new design will also allow for additional information about project applications to appear on the main page.
- The IWG, the ITF Chair, and the United Kingdom delegation will work on a brochure describing ITF activities for external non-expert audiences, including other organizations, the media, and the general public. A draft proposal has been circulated by the United Kingdom. A proper project application, including a budget, will be circulated to the national delegations before the next plenary session. The cost of the project should not exceed USD 10,000 and should be spent from the ITF Fund.

5.5 Memorials Working Group (Cf. detailed MWG report on the listserv)

MWG Co-Chair Teresa Swiebocka (Poland) presented the following issues to the ITF national delegations:

- The Database on Holocaust Memorials and Museums compiled by the Topography of Terror Foundation and the Memorial for the Murder of European Jews is almost finished. The MWG expressed its deep satisfaction with the work already done and with the excellent cooperation with the ITF national delegations in the realization of this major project.

The MWG asked the ITF Chair to order the transfer of the remaining monies in order to finalize the project.

- Given the positive results of the project managed in cooperation with the Jasenovac Memorial Area in Croatia, the MWG suggested that other international advisory groups of ITF experts be established in order to support and advise memorial sites and museums in their new initiatives.

Such projects, supported by the ITF Fund, could be introduced for the memorials of Sobibor and Belzec in Poland.

- The MWG will begin accepting PPAs concerning the realization of Holocaust-related exhibitions. These will be included in the Guidelines on Types of Projects Eligible for ITF Financial Support available on the ITF Web site .
- Information was provided to the national delegations about the ceremonies of the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. Furthermore, in order to promote commemoration activities in ITF member countries in 2005, the MWG suggested that national delegations provide MWG Co-chairs Teresa Swiebocka and Heidemarie Uhl with extensive information about such initiatives.
- The documentation and links gathered will then be posted on the ITF and Auschwitz State Museum Web sites.
- The program of the 2006 Vienna International Conference on Cultures of Commemoration in Eastern Europe, organized by the Austrian delegation, will be established by a group composed of members of the MWG and AWG. The project should be partly supported by the ITF Fund.
- The chairs of the MWG under the Polish Chairmanship will be Dr. Heidemarie Uhl (Academy of Sciences, Austria) and Dr. Dirk Mudler (Memorial Museum Camp Westerboork, the Netherlands)

6 Report of the Strategic and Implementation Working Group

The issues raised by the Strategic and Implementation Working Group, composed of the former and present ITF Chairs, the working group chairs, and the ITF Academic Advisor, in October 14, 2004, in Rome were dealt with directly by the working groups.

A particular issue was pending however. The SIWG had mentioned in October 2004 **the possibility of restricting ITF membership** to countries where the Holocaust took place, thereby limiting the number of member countries to around 30.

The current consensus on that issue was reached after the Washington plenary session of December 2003 and states that “Task Force Membership priorities are European countries historically directly associated with the Holocaust, without exclusion of other countries” (Cf. Membership Options document, established according to the September 11, 2003, recommendations of the Strategic and Implementation Working Group.)

The German delegation declared their support for welcoming into the ITF countries that took an active role in the Holocaust or that were directly affected by it. Moreover, the ITF is still able to function efficiently with no strong bureaucratic support but could not be manageable if it were to accept too many members.

The United States mentioned countries that are already ITF members without having been directly connected to the Holocaust. Furthermore, countries that welcomed a large number of Holocaust refugees should not be excluded.

Sweden expressed its opposition to the establishment of any rule leading to a limitation of membership . No line should be drawn between places where the Holocaust took or did not take place. Sweden and Switzerland are relevant in this regard.

Israel insisted that the ITF's greatest priority is to increase the effectiveness of those that are already members before deciding any kind of rule about the expansion or the limitation of ITF membership.

No consensus was reached on this issue. The plenary concluded that membership candidacies will still be examined in relation to qualitative indications on a case-by-case basis.

7. Special Working Group on Teaching the Holocaust in Multicultural Societies

The Special Working Group comprises the Education and Academic Working Groups. Its purpose is to examine the proposals of a sub committee composed of members of the delegations of Germany (Juliane Wetzel), Italy (Luigi Clavarino), the Netherlands (Karen Polak), Sweden (Christer Mattsson), and the United States (Stephen Feinberg). The subcommittee has compiled a draft memorandum to inspire reflection on the issue. (See annex 2.)

The Special Working Group has decided the following:

- The new subcommittee chair is Christer Mattsson (Living History Forum, Sweden).
- Joining the subcommittee are representatives of Germany (Wolf Kaiser), Hungary (Monika Kovac), and Israel (David Metzler).
- The name of the Special Working Group is changed. Because teaching the Holocaust may be met with resistance by students as well as teachers in various national, cultural, and classroom contexts, the group has been renamed the Special Working Group on Resistance to Teaching and Learning about the Holocaust.
- The reflection on this topic will focus more on the role of teachers than on the role of students with regard to the obstacles encountered in teaching the Holocaust. The subcommittee, in cooperation with academics and sociologists, will prepare a survey to be circulated by the national delegations among teaching communities.
- A draft questionnaire will be presented to the Academic and Education Working Groups before the next plenary meeting.
- The Special Working Group encourages national initiatives related to this issue and is ready to provide recommendations. Two international conferences are being organized in Italy and France in 2005 on Teaching the Shoah in Multicultural Societies. ITF members will participate.

8. Remaining Business

- The Latvian delegation suggested that the Special Working Group on Resistance to Teaching and Learning about the Holocaust could draw more attention to former Soviet Union countries, particularly Russia, where the resurgence of racism and antisemitism is alarming.

An international conference about Holocaust education and contemporary issues in former USSR countries will take place in Riga in 2005.

- The German delegation suggested that member countries bear the travel expenses of their delegates, including nongovernmental organization experts. This seems to be necessary in order to ensure active and adequate participation of member countries in all Working Groups as it has been repeatedly requested by the ITF.
- The United Kingdom delegation mentioned three other issues:

Some delegates face difficulties in spending four full days on ITF business. The Polish Chair could consider revising the usual schedule.

The ITF could begin studying ways to expand its expertise and experience for the benefit of other post-genocidal issues such as those being faced in Bosnia, Cambodia, and Rwanda.

The ITF could serve as a basis for the creation of an international Holocaust Remembrance Day. The current convergence of memorial days calls for such an event to reinforce the international aspects of the commemoration.